

We Do Make a Difference: Shared moral purpose and shared leadership in the pursuit of learning

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ABSTRACT: Shared leadership in education has been the focus of a great deal of scholarly activity. Less attention has been paid to shared moral purpose and to the connection between it and shared leadership in the pursuit of learning. The Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners (LTLL) pilot program set out to explore this gap. This paper presents some of the emerging understandings from the pilot, drawing in particular on focus group interviews, journals and web-based discussions as a source of data. The study reinforces the importance of shared moral purpose, but emphasises the need for explicitness which is supported through a common conceptual framework and consistent use of language. The experience of the LTLL schools also affirms the place of shared leadership in the pursuit of authentic learning, but at the same time warns against simplistic formulations of how this might best be lived out.

Introduction

Michael Fullan (2001) reminds us that more good things are likely to happen in schools where there is a sense of collaboration around a shared moral purpose. Much has already been said and written about shared leadership with its many labels and many forms, but less attention has been paid to what shared moral purpose might look like in practice, and to the connection between this and shared leadership. This paper reports on some findings from a pilot program known as Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners which explored the power of shared moral purpose and shared leadership in supporting teachers as they strive for authentic learning in their schools and classrooms.

Shared Moral Purpose

Shared moral purpose has many labels. The National Quality Schooling Framework used 'shared whole school vision and goals' (Cuttance, et al., 2003). IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools) used 'overarching values' (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, Queensland, 2007) while John MacBeath (2006) referred to it simply as 'moral purpose'. However labelled, a shared moral purpose has been consistently identified in the literature as one of the fundamental necessities for bringing about the kind of change and improvement which will

deliver desirable student learning in schools.

The National College of School Leadership's (2006, p. 3) publication on Understanding Learning Networks describes shared moral purpose as "a compelling idea or aspirational purpose, a shared belief [a team] can achieve far more for their end users together than they can alone".

An alternative perspective is provided by Moos (2006), a colleague of MacBeath's in the Leading for Learning project team, when he advocates the democratic ethic as the basis for schooling. Here though, we come up against the problems which emerge where there is a lack of depth in the shared understanding. Moos (2006, p. 65) writes that: "While most people agree that democratic schools and democratic leadership are good They do not agree on what it means". It may be that an ill-founded sense that beliefs are shared could be as damaging as open disagreement.

As the IDEAS project reminds us, there is a need for shared sense of purpose to be grounded in a shared commitment to explicit values (Andrews & Lewis, 2004). In other words, it is not sufficient to have a broad aspiration. There needs to be clarity and detail in the way the purpose is understood – and in particular about the values which underpin it. There is a long tradition in social psychology (largely ignored by those of us in education) that has demonstrated that the kinds of decisions made by individuals are influenced by the norms at work in the groups in which they operate and by the issues at stake. This is typified by the considerable body of work of Icek Ajzen (e.g., Ajzen, 2005). These norms operate in conjunction with other beliefs and values to create attitudes and dispositions to act (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Bezzina, 1989; Duignan & Bezzina, 2006; Kaplan & Miller, 1987; Parker et al., 1995). Shared norms are one manifestation of what we are here calling shared moral purpose.

The challenge for educational leaders is to find a way to bring this moral purpose to the fore and then to make it part of the discourse of the school so that it can be embedded in practice. In particular, shared leadership seems to offer a way of enhancing the pursuit of, and commitment to, moral purpose.

Shared Leadership

In a study of leadership in service organisations, Duignan (2003) advocates the need for an important shift in the meaning, perspective and scope (depth and breadth) of leadership in schools, in order to build organisational cultures that promote, nurture and support shared leadership.

His is one voice among the many in the chorus which argues that, for reasons which range from survival, through efficacy, to principle, the practice of investing leadership solely in individuals is no longer sustainable. A number of influential authors advocate the need for 'shared leadership' (e.g. Lambert, 2002) or 'distributed leadership' (e.g. Hargreaves & Fink, 2004) or 'parallel leadership' (e.g. Crowther et al., 2002a, 2002b). There seems to be an assumption that because leadership which is shared reflects a more democratic and collaborative approach, it is necessarily a 'good thing', and that once we accept this conclusion such forms of leadership are easily achieved. The problems with this assertion have been canvassed elsewhere (Duignan & Bezzina, 2006), and this paper will not engage with the differentiations among labels nor the complexities in implementation today. Suffice it to say that, while simplistic assumptions around shared leadership are not helpful, there are still powerful arguments supporting its practice.

A range of reasons has been put forward for the pursuit of shared leadership. These might be grouped in two categories: pull factors, which make shared leadership attractive to organisations because they yield desirable results; and push factors, which are characteristics of the external environment that drive practitioners to share leadership because they make it possible for them to function (perhaps even survive) in an increasingly complex and demanding world (Duignan & Bezzina, 2006).

The pull factors are these: Shared leadership actually works in practice (e.g. Crowther et al., 2002a, 2002b; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001; Pearce & Sims, 2002); it builds commitment among those involved (Crowther et al., 2002b; Harris, 2002) and it is intrinsically ethical as a practice (Starratt, 2004). However, Elmore (2000) cautions that collaborative work by teachers will not, alone, lead to changed teacher practices and improved learning outcomes, as there must also be a clear organisational focus on large-scale change and whole-school improvement – a shared moral purpose in other words.

There are factors other than the attributes of shared leadership itself which make it a sensible approach in today's schools, particularly where it gives rise to a sense of shared moral purpose. These push factors are the increasing isolation of principals (D'Arbon et al., 2001), the increasing complexity of their work (Cannon, 2005), and growing ambiguity in contemporary school operations (Duignan, 2003; Duignan & Collins 2003).

Shared leadership and shared moral purpose are important elements in leadership for learning in their own right, and are connected by both their collective nature and their fundamentally ethical basis. At the heart of this connection is a commitment to authentic learning.

Authentic Learning

The most fundamental question for us as educators is this: "What should I do if I am to make a genuine difference to the lives of my students?"

The challenge is to connect the learners' search for meaning and purpose in their lives to a variety of personal experiences in the academic curriculum. We need to enable learners to continuously transform their understanding of themselves and their worlds and to use this to face the challenges and possibilities of their lives and their future. This type of learning is authentic – it is truly transformative.

Starratt (2004) calls on educators to infuse academic learning with a dimension of personal meaning, and thereby enrich the whole learning process. He argues strongly that learning which is not authentic to the needs of the student's life is not only inappropriate but unethical. In other words, an educator who contributes to practices which are not authentic is engaging in behaviour which is morally wrong. This challenge goes to the very heart of what we do as teachers.

Authentic learning is about giving of one's unique humanity to others and to the community. It is more than taking new knowledge and skills for oneself. It is deeply relational. Authentic learning is itself a fundamentally moral activity because it engages students in a deeper understanding of the nature and purpose of their lives and in determining how they can best contribute to the greater good of the community and society (Hodgkinson, 1991; Starratt, 2004). Naming authentic learning as the goal of the work of schools assumes values and ethics which

often go un-named and undiscussed. The challenge for educational leaders is to find ways to make these explicit - to give them expression and to promote ownership.

The following sections describe an attempt to address this challenge. They focus on the learnings that emerged in the Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners pilot project.

The Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners Pilot

The LTLL pilot set out to explore how leadership and learning practices based on a shared moral purpose might facilitate the work of teachers and leaders in enhancing student learning.

Overview of methodology

There were nine case study schools, four secondary and five primary, drawn from four Catholic educational systems in NSW. Two of these systems were based in country cities and the other two were in metropolitan Sydney. Thirty-three teachers made up the nine project teams who were part of the study. The schools were the focus of analysis and data were gathered through the project teams. The whole project was designed and managed collaboratively by representatives of the Australian Catholic University, the case study schools and the systems to which they belonged. The project had four major dimensions during the 18 months of its duration.

First, the development of a tentative conceptual framework which elaborated and made explicit the dimensions of values, ethics, leadership and learning which were seen as likely to contribute to authentic (transformed) learning for students. This is discussed below.

Second, each case study school identified an area for improvement and was supported as it planned and implemented a strategy to address this. The improvement initiative became a primary focus of learning, and was documented for presentation to peers.

Third, case study schools were engaged in a professional development program involving six plenary sessions over a period of some 18 months, which familiarised them with the LTLL framework and assisted them to implement its insights in their self-selected school improvement projects. This program provided them with exposure to elements of the model and the opportunity to engage with all the other case study schools as they worked through their own school's project, and refined strategies in the light of experience, interaction and input. Between sessions, schools could work on-line with one another and with representatives of their systems in the implementation and monitoring of their initiatives.

Overarching the three previous dimensions was the fourth – research. A priority for this was that it be as closely articulated with the professional development and school improvement projects as possible. Thus, the various forms of data collected were intended to be used by the participants in their own work wherever possible. The reflective tool which elaborated the conceptual framework was used as a means of focussing or refining the area for school improvement, as well as a source of data for researchers. Two sample pages from the reflective tool can be seen in Appendix 1. The on-line discussions which built on the themes of the plenary sessions were designed to extend opportunities for learning across the nine schools, and again provided researchers with insights into the evolution of understandings. Similarly, journaling was

encouraged as a basis for reflection, and the data from these journals were subsequently made available to researchers. A closing conference gave the schools an opportunity to share with one another and with representatives of their school systems the progress on their school initiatives, and the papers they produced became part of the researchers' body of data. Finally, shortly after the conference, each team was interviewed by a person who had not been involved in LTLL to date, and the recordings of these interviews were transcribed for analysis. This article draws on the data from on-line discussions, journals and the focus group interviews.

The interview transcripts were analysed to identify recurrent themes and these were sorted according to the number of schools in which they emerged. A summary table of the emergent themes appears as Appendix 2. The themes were then used as a basis for the examination of the on-line discussion threads and as an aid in the analysis of journals. Indicative quotations, which capture the sense reflected by the recurrent themes, were used to elaborate these themes more fully.

The conceptual framework

The conceptual framework which was at the heart of the LTLL initiative was an attempt to capitalise on what was seen as a growing consensus in the literature around leadership and learning behaviours that had been shown to enhance student learning.

This consensus extends to such issues as the importance of the quality of the teacher, primacy of assessment for learning, whole-school approaches to planning and implementation of curriculum, shared moral purpose, and the need to link leadership and learning (Crowther et al., 2002a, 2002b; Cuttance, 2001, 2003; Hattie, 2003; Hill & Crevola, 1998; Marzano et al., 2005; Newmann et al., 1996). The LTLL initiative set out to harness this growing consensus and to contextualise it for its particular group of schools and their leaders.

A series of workshops with stakeholders – 12 representatives of the four participating systems including both senior system leadership and school practitioners and three researchers from the university – engaged with the recent literature in the field. Participants were motivated by a desire to articulate an approach to leadership of learning that captured a view of the transformed learner that was founded in explicit values and ethics, and reflected the best current understandings of where leaders could best focus in the area of authentic learning, and how they ought to exercise leadership in this domain. This ultimately gave rise to a somewhat linear conceptual model comprising the dimensions of values, ethics, leadership, learning and the transformed learner, which would be tested in the research. Such a model was seen as being meaningful to practitioners, as having the capacity to incorporate existing best understandings, and of addressing what was seen as a significant gap in the elaboration of moral purpose in work to date.

A starting point for the structure of the framework was the National Quality Schooling Framework (Cuttance et al., 2003). The NQSF was an interactive, web-based tool to support school leaders in improving student outcomes. It drew on the fields of school and teacher effectiveness, school improvement and innovation in order to provide practical resources for schools.

The NQSF tool had 10 dimensions:

1. Beliefs and understandings
2. Curriculum, standards and targets
3. Monitoring, assessment and reporting
4. Learning
5. Teaching
6. Professional learning
7. School and class organisation
8. Intervention and special assistance
9. Home, school and community partnerships
10. Leadership and management.

The LTLL project made a number of adaptations. Responding to the limitations of the use of moral purpose as a construct to date, discussed previously, it replaced the Beliefs and Understandings element by five Values elements and three Ethics elements, through which these values would be exercised. The values emerged from workshop discussions among the expert practitioners in the management team. The approach to ethics was adapted from the work of Starratt (2004) on ethical leadership. Again, drawing on the literature and practitioner feedback, a number of elements which were evident within the broader dimensions of the NQSF framework were brought to the fore in their own right, namely evidence based practice (Lambert, 1998), sustainability (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), culture and community (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995) and change management (Fullan, 2001). Lastly, all elements were organised to reflect the priorities of the stakeholders under the dimensions of the tentative framework, and sets of indicators were adapted or developed for each. Samples of the indicators appear in Appendix 1. The initial model appears below as Figure 1.

This framework was simply intended to be a starting point for structured conversations about learning and leadership in the case study schools, with the objective of exploring understandings of the dynamics at work, and determining whether such a framework would be seen as useful by practitioners. The results of the interviews (see Appendix 2) demonstrate that the framework was seen as helping to understand the connection between leading and learning, providing a focus on issues of identity, authenticity and transformation, aligning well with teacher experience as well as provoking some shifts in understanding. As a result of the pilot, this initial, linear model was adapted to better reflect the dynamism of the interplay among elements. The revision appears below in Figure 2. As was the case in the initial model, each of the major dimensions of the model (e.g. Values and Ethics or Educative Leadership) is elaborated in terms of a number of key elements and each of these elements is further described by a series of indicators.

FIGURE 1: THE ORIGINAL LTLL CONCEPTUAL MODEL

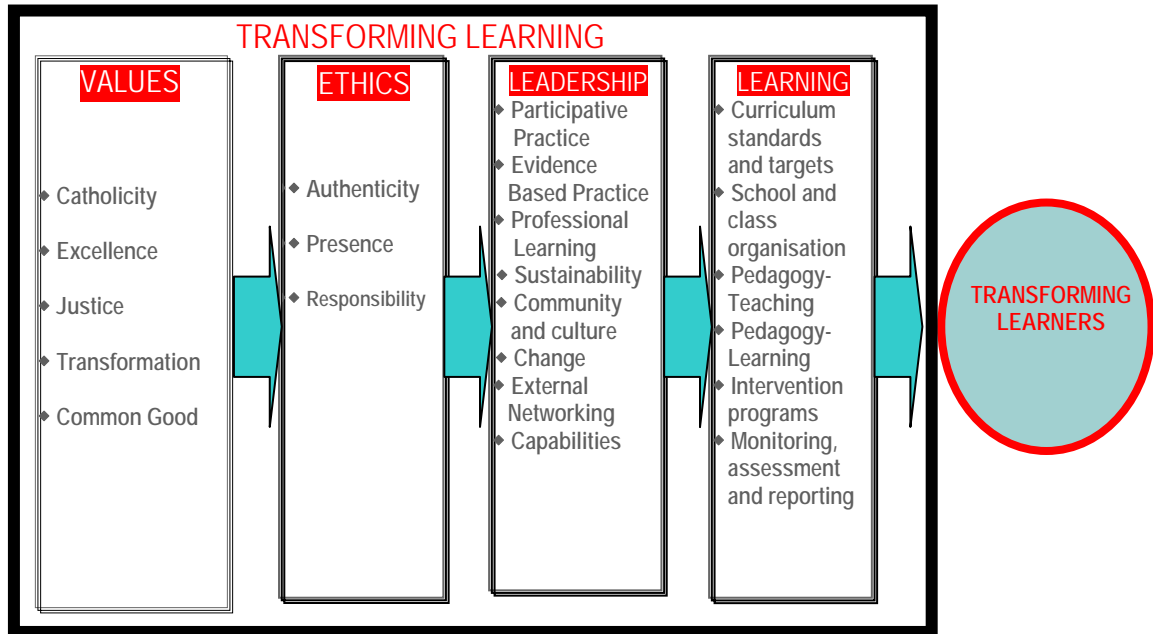
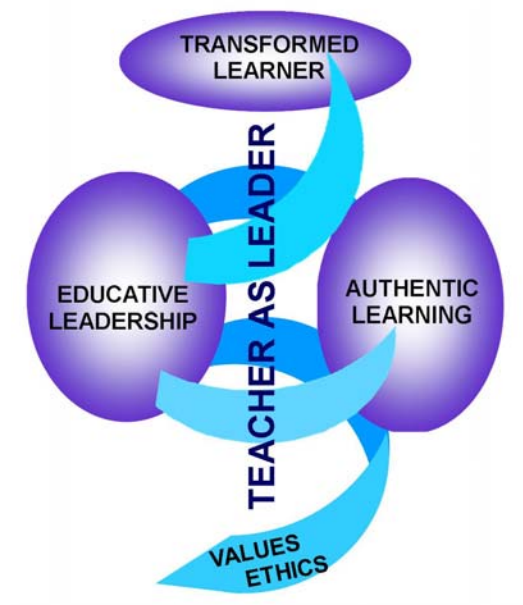


FIGURE 2: THE REVISED LTLL CONCEPTUAL MODEL



Findings

The analysis of the transcribed interviews allowed researchers to identify areas of consensus within each school team of three or four people, and then to trace the emergence of these themes across the nine schools. The number of schools within which a theme emerges is used as a measure of the strength of perception. The stronger perceptions form the basis for discussion, and quotations which best capture experience in the language of participants are then used for illustration and elaboration. The results and discussion which follow will be dealt with in terms of shared moral purpose, shared leadership and the interaction between them.

LTLL and shared moral purpose

Participants' contributions about shared moral purpose can be grouped into four categories: the foundational status that was given to values and ethics, school identity, explicitness in the treatment of moral purpose, and finally impact on practice.

Foundational status of values and ethics

A critical factor that underpinned the usefulness and impact of the framework was the foundational status it gives to values and ethics. Seven of the nine schools identified this as a major strength of the approach. One participant in School A commented that the model:

highlighted the values and ethics that underpin ... authentic leadership.

Two participants in School B put it this way, one completing the statement for the other:

(1) There's one particular quote from Starratt that stuck in my guts and continues to haunt me. It's the one about ... (2) Seeing inauthentic learning and doing nothing about it.

The research team was struck by the visceral nature of the language used here. The centrality of an ethical stance provoked more than a simply intellectual or practical response.

School identity

Eight of the nine schools commented on the way in which the model enabled them to focus on the issue of identity and authenticity, and seven highlighted the significance of values and ethics – the foundation of identity – in this regard. In the context of a study of schools with a particular faith affiliation, Catholicity was seen as a key element of identity in the elaboration of the values component of the conceptual framework by the experts who engaged with the research team. Participants' responses validated its incorporation in the model for their schools with comments such as these from Schools E and F:

... the model clearly points out what we're here for in Catholic education.

... the model for me has really emphasised... the moral nature of teaching, and I think... Catholics can grab hold of the model very easily and use it [as a] framework for their work.

The key issue here, though, is not Catholicity per se, (after all, this is only one element of the model) but rather the making explicit of a common set of values. The test of validity will always be the sense among participants that it has captured their sense of moral purpose.

Explicitness

Given earlier comments on the need for greater explicitness in the treatment of moral purpose, it is noteworthy that this was a feature of the LTLL framework that was valued by participants. Eight of the nine schools made comments about the explicit focus on identity, authenticity and transformation. School D team members spoke of the importance of this explicitness. One identified:

The need for that clear sense of values to be integrated into all areas of the curriculum, while a colleague valued the way it allowed them to:

... be able to articulate once again just what were the elements and the values, what were the ethics, and what [it meant] to be accountable in terms of our presence to kids and our responsibility ethic and just what authenticmeans.

Again, we can see how the impact of explicitness went beyond the purely intellectual. The process of articulation provoked personal ethical responses as reported by one participant in School I:

We presented different aspects of the model to the teachers and looking at all the indicators... well this is what we should be doing if we are Catholic, or excellent, or just ... It was fabulous because it really pricked some people's consciences.

The explicit articulation of indicators in the framework was aided by the use of a consistent vocabulary. The use of common language was a way of facilitating engagement around the ideas, and of bridging theory and practice. A school G respondent put it this way:

It's the combination of the theory and the bottom end stuff because we've been given, through the theory ... a whole lot of language that we've been able to use and validate why we would do things in a certain way. That's made it really logical and so that's gotten everyone on board which has then meant that you can do the focussing on the kids.

The emphasis on explicitness went beyond the individual elements of the framework to include its capacity to identify relationships among the elements. A participant in School G spoke of the way in which they were immediately able to see a 'pathway' through the framework for their school.

Awareness of the foundational nature of the values component was not always so instantaneous. It grew slowly in some cases, such as school H:

We hadn't actually thought about it, when we'd started the project, as coming from the values base.

The deliberate attention paid to a shared moral purpose, as expressed in the LTLL conceptual framework was seen also as having a direct impact on practice.

Impact on practice

In six of the nine schools, explicit mention was made of the way in which the LTLL project opened teachers up to change. For example, a participant in School I said:

I thought that the shift in pedagogy only occurred when there was a committed shift in the values base. ... So, for example, in year 1, they actually changed their values and beliefs about how they taught Maths, and then their pedagogy changed.

Some of the participating schools made extensive use of the reflective tool which included all the indicators for each of the components. This was, for them, the key vehicle for making shared moral purpose explicit, using shared, explicit language. It allowed them to identify focuses for

action, and possibilities for improvement. A School H respondent put it this way:

I think the reflective tool has made us sit at times and think and reflect and ponder on what the practices are, how well we do them, what we could possibly do to improve. And I think that's been very, very valuable.

The use of the LTLL process and framework was valued by participating schools for its strong foundations in the moral purpose of their schools, for the way in which it made explicit various dimensions of this purpose through the identification of indicators and the use of consistent language, for its impact on teacher beliefs and practices, and for its capacity to engage people collaboratively in consideration of moral purpose.

Attention now turns to a consideration of what the LTLL experience has to teach us about shared leadership.

LTLL and shared leadership

The responses in focus groups provided insights focussed on two major themes: the general dynamics of collaboration, and how these expressed themselves more particularly in the context of shared leadership.

General dynamics of collaboration

Seven schools referred to the importance of participants sharing their professional learning within the project, and the essential role of open and supportive dialogue in this process. This is highlighted in the following comment from School D, typical of several others:

I think the second thing is just this concept around professional learning and the importance of professional dialogue and opportunities for staff to be able to talk about just what we mean when we talk about student learning.

Seven of the schools found the involvement of the whole staff in the project, while being necessary, to be an area of tension and challenge as well. In some cases the impact on the whole staff surprised the project teams. A participant in School D put it this way:

... we thought the greatest impact of the project would be on the students and what's actually happened is the greatest impact's been on the staff, which is not the aim but that's the result.

A particular impact of collaborative practices on staff identified in six of the schools was an increasing openness to change. This resulted from a deepening of ongoing relationships, and from capitalising on individual talents. A third observation from School D reflects on this:

... the main issues I think ... to a large extent have been resolved.... mainly because we have been able to work on events and on programs together which have sort of crystallised some of those relationships and have exhibited people's strengths as well so that perhaps in some case a grudging respect started to develop.

More than half the schools mentioned the challenge of engaging with teachers in such a way that they would become comfortable with open sharing of their classroom with other teachers. This challenge to the norm of autonomy and the physical isolation of some teachers' work was seen as being addressed by the collaborative processes of the project. School G's experience will be discussed in more detail later in the paper, but one staff member commented on the theme of

anxiety, and getting past it to implement their project:

Our relationships have gone to another level because prior to this project, to ask a teacher to go into a classroom would have ... well the project almost didn't go ahead.

The fact that these visits did go ahead and are now a part of this school's routine is a major success of their project.

Eight schools specifically mentioned the fact that the model was of assistance in reflection on current or past practice. This has both personal and collective dimensions. A School H participant described the personal dimension in these terms:

It's been very, very positive in that it's allowed people who otherwise in the business of their day often don't get the chance to really reflect and think, to articulate what we do well and where we're at.

Having considered collaboration in a general sense, what of shared leadership in particular?

The experience of shared leadership

Eight of the nine school teams made observations regarding their experience of shared leadership in the project. This sharing in the leadership process was seen to express itself at all levels within the project and was seen as an essential element in the ownership of the project across the school community. Comments on how leadership was shared and expressed within the project addressed issues such as the approach of the principal, the responsibilities and roles within the project team and how other staff became engaged and committed to the project.

One of the most frequently mentioned consequences of sharing was the development of a sense of ownership (eight schools), and a growing appreciation of the role of teachers as leaders (five schools). One participant in School G commented:

I think it's the ownership idea that everybody, all the staff members, all have something significant to offer as leaders, not just as teachers, but as teacher/leaders.

And another from school B said this:

So once you own it, in the sense you start leading that learning rather than being passed down from on high, when there's no ownership.

One participant in School E who did not hold a formal leadership role in the school wanted to draw attention not only to ownership, but to empowerment:

I think that [I've become aware of] the need and importance of distributed leadership not only in teaching but empowering leaders to be learners and as just a classroom teacher, it's been a really good experience for me to be involved in stepping up and leading in some areas outside of just teaching the students.

In the earlier discussion of shared leadership there was a caution against simplistic formulations of its exercise and benefits. A case in point emerged in three of the case study schools, in which the critical importance of the leadership of the principal for the initiation and success of the school project was identified.

There was a strong appreciation of principals being directly engaged – one of the 'ground rules' of the project - as expressed by one School B respondent.

I think it needs to have a principal involved. It needs to be an ultimate thing and the principal needs to own it and the principal needs to be an equal member of the team.

In addition, and, at least on the surface, counter to the principles of shared leadership, one third of the schools made comments supporting the need for strong (even directive) formal leadership – particularly in the early stages of an initiative. The experience of this project confirms the commonsense notion that there will always be circumstances in which those in formal positions of leadership within the hierarchical structure play a significant role in shaping and giving force to initiatives.

A typical comment came from School D, focussing on the early stages of the initiative as a particular period when such leadership was needed:

The idea (for the project) came from the school leader. It came from the existing principal at the time. It didn't come from staff, it didn't come about as recommendations of staff, it came about from somebody who had the overview of the school ... So I think that leadership was crucial at that point because the initial conception of the project came from that point.

This perception is repeated in the comment from the team at School B, which implies a longer term engagement of 'driving' leadership:

... without leadership as the driving force, the project would never have been started.

This strong leadership did not always have to come from within the hierarchical structure, though. School H identified a team member - not the principal - as the driving force behind the success of the project.

I think one good thing too is that we had (X) who is really very good at process and actually was I think the driver of the whole project and he sort of kept us on track.

As well as this endorsement of strong individual leaders, particularly in the early stages of an initiative, there was also widespread support for teacher participation in leadership, and the notion of teachers as leaders was explicitly mentioned in eight schools.

Teacher leadership was seen as a positive element of the LTLL experience. Teachers in five of the nine schools made observations about discovering their own capacities for leadership in ways which indicated that they had not previously seen themselves in this role. The concept of teachers being leaders may be one which is common in the academic literature but it still appeared as a little out of the ordinary to some teachers in the project. The following example from School B is typical:

Well, the linkage jumped out at me very strongly on the first visit to ACU and the entire day talked about leadership and learning but never the word principal, I don't think was mentioned all day and I took away a great sense of enthusiasm about the theme that I picked up through the day that we are all leaders, and we all have a responsibility to lead in the whole process of learning.

In summary, the collaborative nature of the LTLL project was valued by participants for its capacity to enhance professional learning, to overcome tensions around the prospect of change and to overcome the isolation of the classroom. Shared leadership in particular was not an experience taken for granted by all of the participants. The opportunities presented by LTLL for the exercise of such leadership were valued, while still recognising the need for individuals (and usually the principal) to take strong initiatives.

Up to this point, the issues of shared moral purpose and shared leadership have been treated

separately. Attention now turns to the interplay between these two dynamics, and to illustrating this using data from the on-line discussion, focus group interview and from the project journal from one of the case study schools – School G - a small primary school.

Shared moral purpose and shared leadership: The interplay

This interplay between shared moral purpose and shared leadership was captured effectively, albeit in slightly different language (what we wanted to achieve and ownership), by one of the participants in School G in the focus group interview, who said:

Well I think the further we got into it, the more it became apparent that the more ownership everybody has, and the more you become a leader, the better the quality of learning. And the more we learned the better all of us became at articulating what we wanted to achieve, sharing what we were learning, and it was almost a natural progression around what took place.

The notion of a natural progression is very compelling. Logically, moral purpose can only be shared if it is understood (made explicit), if it becomes internalised by individuals, and if its internalisation is widespread – factors which are unlikely to come into play in the absence of the shared learning and ownership which are at the heart of shared leadership as experienced in the LTLL schools. On the other hand, the development of shared leadership implies commonality of purpose, clarity of conceptualisation and a shared language – which feature strongly in the experience of shared moral purpose. There is a reciprocal influence taking place here.

The LTLL experience of the School G is one which serves to illustrate the interplay between moral purpose and leadership very clearly. The discussion which follows draws on the focus group interview data, the journal kept by the principal and entries made by the school on the shared website.

It is possible to get a sense of the depth of thinking that was going on in school G by quoting somewhat extensively from a fascinating on-line discussion entry by the principal in November 2005.

It is no longer enough that we understand the right way to teach literacy and numeracy, it has become a moral imperative to address what is hindering the learning process.

... The involvement of staff in such a project as ours, requires them to participate and engage in levels previously not required -other than superficially. It has become a conscious process.

As the Principal I have been so overwhelmed by the many subtle ways that attitudes have changed, and how learnings have been embraced simply by consciously walking an ethical journey.

It has meant allowing staff to be leaders, not just talk about them as leaders.

It requires me to allow time for all teachers to participate in genuine decision making. In a way I have to mirror everyone but reflect back the story meaningfully so that it not just a glittering image or a shattered or fragmented picture. I do not mean this to sound like I am all important, rather I am simply necessary. In a way, as leader, I have become the keeper of the stories. My story cannot be bigger or more important than anyone else's, though, or the reflection becomes distorted.

With its powerful and passionate sense of authenticity and its caring presence to, and deep

sense of responsibility for both staff and students, this principal's perspective is strongly imbued with the three ethics which are central to the LTLL framework. Leadership and responsibility are seen by this principal as being shared, not in the sense of the sometimes grudging distribution of shares in a fixed commodity, but in the more powerful sense that leadership responsibilities are a part of the ethical imperative for teachers – a key element of giving expression to the moral purpose. Here too is an example of the power (in its best sense) of the principal to inspire colleagues through the articulation of vision and by example, and then to create the space in which genuinely shared leadership can take place.

In the context of the focus interview held with the four members of the School G project team (only two of whom had formal leadership positions), there was a telling interchange which highlighted both purpose and shared leadership. When one teacher summed up the moral purpose as being 'centred on the child', a second responded immediately in terms of shared leadership by saying:

... when you've got the whole team behind you, you have a better chance of success. So there's a very strong link between leadership and learning and we're all leaders here.

Simply naming a shared moral purpose or committing to shared leadership does not wipe away all the obstacles to success. As in all examples of change, anxiety and lack of trust can work to prevent people acting in ways that will reflect their espoused values. A striking element of the principal's journal of school G's initiative was how often the idea of anxiety was expressed in the early stages. In the first month, anxiety or related ideas were mentioned 22 times. In the second month they were mentioned 15 times. In the third month these themes appeared three times. Journal entries became less frequent after this, but from October 2005 to mid-March 2006 (including extended school holidays) there were only five mentions of anxiety related issues, and from then until the end of the journal in October of that year, only two more. In fact, by then, the absence of fear had become a focus for discussion in its own right, as will be seen as we trace the evolution of this theme.

One source of anxiety in the early stages of the initiative was a lack of confidence on the part of the teachers. Some typical explanations from the journal include these, gathered from different pages of the early part of the journal:

- They struggle to see themselves as teacher leaders
- Y wondered whether she would have the time, the intelligence and the understanding of what was required.
- Z was happy to support us as a member of staff, but expressed anxiety about being 'overwhelmed' already.

A second factor contributing to early anxiety was the fear of being exposed to others. This theme actually emerged in the interviews in three of the other schools as well. In June 2005 the principal comments on her own reaction:

... a huge rush of anxiety. Was I organised enough, wise enough, intelligent enough?
All my failures as a leader would no doubt be under the microscope.

One of the major strategies selected in this school was peer classroom visitation, which provoked similar fear of scrutiny in teachers. When it was first proposed, the principal and

assistant principal recognised that it would be seen as ‘confronting’ and that it would rely on a level of trust in each other and the principal – that ‘did not currently exist’. The journal identifies one of the objectives of the school’s project as building that kind of trust:

... the project we have devised will gently erode fear, tackle genuine issues and provide opportunities for genuine professional discourse and learning. These opportunities will, I believe, develop a foundation for open discussion that is ethical and centred firmly upon improving learning for our students. It is my hope that these experiences would build trust, develop confidence, assist a culture of positive critiquing and clarifying what each of us as educators really believe is essential as learning.

This extract from a July 2005 journal entry was made when the project was still in the planning stages, but already the principal – and indeed the school community – is engaged in the point of interplay between aspects of moral purpose (‘ethical and centred firmly on learning’) and elements of shared leadership (‘open discussion’, ‘genuine professional discourse’, ‘a culture of positive critiquing’), even though the precise mechanics are not yet specific. Trust and confidence are seen as key ingredients of success.

By August, the early classroom visits prompted this entry about the centrality of trust:

The project is forcing us out of our comfort zones. It is challenging us personally and professionally and really testing our levels of trust.

By October, the focus had shifted from the initial self-focused anxieties to centre on teacher actions to give expression to moral purpose.

.. staff are becoming clearer about where they stand, their beliefs and values. They are becoming more skilled at articulating what they have learned and how this can be used to transform learning.

By March of the following year, the focus had shifted again, this time from teacher actions to the outcomes for students, where a concerted focus on individualised attention allowed the principal to comment on the ‘great pride’ teachers were experiencing in their achievements, and the absence of anxiety around the now well-embedded processes of mutual support. It seems that gathering around shared purpose in a fundamentally collaborative way was a way of getting around obstacles to improvement.

The experience of this case study school illustrates how a common moral purpose and shared leadership are linked to each other through the medium of trusting relationships. Without these, it appears unlikely that teachers would have had either the confidence or the reason to engage in taking on the mantle of educational leadership in a collaborative fashion which promoted deepening the sense of shared moral purpose. Tschannen-Moran (2004, p. 15) describes this trust as, paradoxically, “both a glue and a lubricant”. The glue might be seen as the reason for the behaviours – the moral purpose, while the confidence in sharing with one another provides the lubricant for constructive action. The cultivation of trust involves, as we are reminded by Fukuyama (1995), navigating the tensions between individual desires and the building up of relationships. This is done, according to Solomon and Flores (2001) through speech, conversation, commitments and action – distinguishing characteristics of School G’s activities.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to explore and extend some of the current understandings of shared moral purpose and shared leadership in the light of the experience of the *Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners* pilot project. This has allowed an appreciation of how the two critical variables operated in their own right in a range of school settings before analysing the interplay between moral purpose and shared leadership in the context of one of these schools.

The LTLL pilot has affirmed the importance attached to shared moral purpose by so much of the literature. It has reinforced also the view of Andrews and Lewis (2004) that there is a need to be quite explicit about this moral purpose. The study has suggested how such explicitness might be achieved through an elaborated conceptual framework with an associated vocabulary, thus addressing Moos' (2006) caution about the need to develop agreement on the meaning of moral purposes which might be espoused. The study has highlighted the power of the common language embodied in the conceptual framework, and has shown how opportunities for discourse can lead to commitment to purpose in the way envisaged by NCSL (2006, p. 3) as a stimulus to action.

The place of some form of shared leadership in the pursuit of authentic learning, as argued by Lambert (2002), Crowther et al. (2002a, 2002b) has also been affirmed, but at the same time the warning against simplistic formulations of how this might best be lived out (e.g. Duignan, 2003; Duignan & Bezzina, 2006) has been reinforced. There is clearly a role for strong individual initiative, but in the context of shared moral purpose this is able to become collective action based on ownership, commitment and shared leadership, rather than a heroic individual struggle.

Placing an emphasis on the moral and ethical dimensions of school life, as has been argued by Starratt (2004) has been shown in LTLL to be an enabler of leadership. The interplay between these dimensions and shared leadership, as illustrated in the details of School G's experience (which was not atypical), was able to move a school from a place where individually and collectively teachers were almost paralysed by fear, to a confident and proactive learning community pursuing a deep moral purpose in an environment of trust. This process took place, as Tschannen-Moran (2004) noted, gradually over time.

The way ahead for leaders lies in the power of an explicit and widely owned moral purpose as the driver and nurturer of a leadership which is the responsibility of every teacher. The LTLL pilot shows promising signs that it is possible for school communities to work together to harness this moral purpose in the pursuit of authentic learning for their students.

It is fitting to leave the last words to the principal of School G. When she read a draft of this paper, she responded with a few words about what had been most profound for her and her school in the LTLL experience. The emphases are hers.

I am very proud of where we have arrived, and where we continue to grow. ... The personal growth, confidence, hope and decision to make a difference continue to burn strongly. Even better is the reality that it is unthinkable that a child could fail. Every day continues to be characterised by sweat, determination and the belief that we do make a difference.

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**APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE PAGES FROM LTLL REFLECTIVE TOOL
DEMONSTRATING THE JUSTICE ELEMENT OF THE VALUES
DIMENSION AND THE CHANGE MANAGEMENT ELEMENT OF THE
LEADERSHIP DIMENSION AND THEIR INDICATORS.**

VALUES: 2 – Justice			
	Indicator	Our Evidence Record here in point form the visible signs that this indicator is present in your school	Rating 1-Strongly Evident to 4 – Not at all evident
1	Embrace the diversity of people and cultures.		
2	Promote collaborative practice.		
3	Reach out particularly to those who are poor, marginalised and most in need.		
4	Ensure that administrative and educational practices address the issues of access and equity.		
5	Take a public stance on issues of injustice and inequality.		
6	Ensure equitable distribution of resources.		
Total of Ratings			
MEAN SCORE FOR JUSTICE (Total/6)			

LEADERSHIP: 6 – Change management			
	Indicator	Our Evidence (Record here in point form the visible signs that this indicator is present in your school)	Rating 1-Strongly Evident to 4 – Not at all evident
1	Drive change out of agreed moral purpose		
2	Work with all those impacted by change so that they understand both the change processes and the change itself.		
3	Recognise that change happens best in the context of the relationships within a learning community.		
4	Have structures and processes for the development and sharing of knowledge.		
5	Build coherence through an explicit alignment of values and practices.		
6	Have leaders who are enthusiastic, energetic and hope-filled		
Total of ratings			
MEAN SCORE FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT (Total /6)			

APPENDIX 2: THEMES EMERGING FROM INTERVIEWS

Theme	Sub-Theme	No of schools
Values/ethics	The values/ethics components were of particular significance	7
	Transformation was seen as a key element of authentic learning	6
	Leadership is underpinned by values/ethics	5
	The need for authenticity, significance – a sense of the big picture in structuring learning	4
Teacher behaviour	The program led to changes in specific teaching behaviours	8
	It was acknowledged that teachers are learners as well – the importance of reflection	6
	Teachers were opened up to change	6
	Evidence based practice was seen as important to good practice	3
Student impact	The student is understood to be central in good learning	4
	The project enhanced student engagement	4
	There was a shift to higher levels of demand on students/higher order thinking	4
Model	The conceptual framework helped in understanding and reflection on the connection between leadership and learning	8
	The model focused us on issues of identity and authenticity	8
	The model aligned well with our experience of reality	6
	The use of the model enabled/provoked change/transformation in teachers as well as students	4
	The use of the model changed understandings of leadership	4
	The process of using the model affirmed collaborative leadership practice	3
Impact on teachers	Participants experienced a loss of control and need for support	8
	Participants developed a sense that leaders can impact on learning	5
	The program as a whole was of very high quality/had significant impact	5
	Teachers were conscious that their work was being exposed to colleagues	4
	Teachers felt personally affirmed	2
	The experience posed challenges to confidence and personal sense of competence	2

Shared leadership and collaboration	Shared leadership/ownership, and gaining and maintaining commitment were seen as important	8
	Participants valued the experience of shared professional learning and dialogue	7
	It was a challenge to involve the whole staff	7
	There was a growth of awareness that all can contribute to leadership	5
	Silos among department and year levels were broken down	4
	There was an expressed need for direction from formal leaders.	3
	It was apparent that people are interested in leadership in different ways	2
Learning	The conceptual framework helped in understanding and reflection on the connection between leadership and learning	8
	Transformation was seen as a key element of authentic learning	6
	Participants appreciated the need for authenticity, significance – a sense of the big picture in structuring learning	4
	The student is understood to be central in good learning	4
	The project enhanced student engagement	4
	There was a shift to higher levels of demand on students/higher order thinking	4